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ABSTRACT

Training for family literacy began in 1993 with the development of the "Come Read with Me" model. Since that time over 300 facilitators have been trained, but a 1997 survey found only a fraction of these individuals were still active in family literacy programs. The Saskatchewan Literacy Network was faced with the challenge of delivering training across a vast and sparsely populated province. Yet clearly something beyond training is needed if family literacy is to be sustainable, and broad community support is essential if family literacy is to move beyond a piecemeal project-based approach. This report is the synthesis of an earlier report and review by Saskatchewan's Provincial Advisory Committee. The report outlines a strategy for a provincially wide community development approach to family literacy programming and the training that would support this development. It is intended to broaden awareness beyond government levels and the organizations and agencies that apply for grant funding. It provides a structure for a growing development of skills for programming and for training. The report states that a key point is the development of a shared vision of what constitutes the "whole" scope of skills and knowledge around family literacy programming. According to the report, the strategy calls for the development of a checklist to identify the scope of skills and knowledge involved in family literacy programming and provide a better way for communities to assess their strengths and training needs. It also calls for the development of training models and well-developed, plain language resource models. (NKA)

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"VISIONING THE WHOLE ELEPHANT"

The Case for a Provincial Family Literacy Strategy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Training for family literacy in Saskatchewan began in 1993 with the development of the *Come Read With Me* model. Since that time over 300 facilitators have been trained but a 1997 survey of these individuals found that only a fraction were still active in family literacy programs. Clearly something beyond training of individuals is needed if family literacy is to be sustainable and broad community support is essential if family literacy is to move beyond a piecemeal project-based approach.

The announcement of the provincial Family Literacy Initiative in the 1998 budget created enormous demand for "training". The Saskatchewan Literacy Network was faced with the challenge of delivering training across a vast and sparsely populated province. How could quality training be provided across the province and still be affordable, relevant and of a high quality? The Saskatchewan Literacy Network contracted Norma Klassen, Family Literacy consultant, to conduct a four-month needs assessment and develop recommendations for a provincial training strategy. This report is the synthesis of Norma's report and review of it by the Provincial Advisory Committee.

Come Read With Me was derived from the Homespun model but emphasizes group process over a prescriptive curriculum. Training was designed for people who had experience in adult education, early childhood education, lifeskills and parenting education. With hindsight, it is not surprising that few participants had this breadth of experience and they often had few resources to draw upon when they return to their communities to run programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Saskatchewan Literacy Network initiate the development of a provincial family literacy strategy.
2. That the Saskatchewan Literacy Network explore ways to incorporate a community development component into family literacy training.
3. That *Come Read With Training* be the basis of level 1 Family Literacy Facilitator Training
4. That a Checklist of Skills necessary for facilitators be developed.
5. That Prior Learning Assessment be used to determine training needs in relation to the Checklist of Skills.
6. That the *Come Read With Training* manual be revised and expanded to support:
   - a strengths-based philosophy of family literacy
   - modularized training, each module having clearly stated prerequisites
   - training for a variety of audiences
   - comprehensive resources for facilitator use
   - Prior Learning Assessment of participants
7. That the Saskatchewan Literacy Network coordinate level 2 training for family literacy facilitators at a provincial level by:
   - establishing a process of ongoing identification of the training needs
   - organizing training in response to those needs.
8. That SLN begin the process of establishing accreditation for family literacy training.

INTRODUCTION AND ANALOGY

Since the early 90s the terms "family literacy" and "family literacy programming" have gradually trickled into the vernacular of Saskatchewan organizations, agencies, institutions and government departments concerned with individuals considered "at risk." The concept of family literacy programming gains almost universal appeal, as it is built on the unique bonds within family relationships and, as such, touches people at an emotional as well as a common sense level. Recent provincial grants, specifically for family literacy programming, have broadened awareness of a diverse range of groups which previously might not have considered "the family" and "literacy" as part of their mandate. Universal appeal and increased exposure have created a rapid growth of interest and inquiries concerning family literacy and training.

What is our vision of family literacy programming, its scope, and what training is needed? Current approaches, challenges, and perhaps solutions may be better understood through an analogy from the children's book, SEVEN BLIND MICE by Ed Young, winner of a 1992 Caldecott Honor Award.

> As the story goes, seven blind mice discover a strange Something near their pond, and each day a different mouse tries to determine what the strange Something is by examining a part of it. "It's a pillar," says the first; "It's a snake," says the second"; "It's a spear", says the third. "It's a rope, it's a fan, it's a cliff," say the others. On the seventh day, the white blind mouse takes the time and trouble to run up and down, back and forth, end to end, on the strange Something, and discovers that, while the Something has characteristics of each of the other findings, it really is an elephant! The other mice agree after they examine the elephant fully. "The Mouse Moral: Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole."

Family literacy and family literacy programming can be compared to the intriguing "Strange Something" that has come to the Saskatchewan pond. The approach often taken to learning about family literacy is like that of the blind mice who made decisions concerning the whole after examining a part. This has created many partial visions of what the scope of family literacy programming entails.

A provincial family literacy strategy could play the role of the white mouse and could direct communities to carefully examine all the component parts of knowledge, skills, and experience in order to get a better understanding of the whole before making decisions concerning programming and training.

"THE WHOLE ELEPHANT"

Studies of successful family literacy programs refer to a vision of family literacy as "a multi-faceted interactive social process which shapes ways of thinking for both adult and child" and "a social movement based on social equity and empowerment of families" (Adele Thomas, Sharon Skage, Family Literacy in Canada: Profiles of Effective Practices, (1998), p.5) This is much broader than the view of programming simply in terms of providing instruction for parents to improve reading, writing and career development skills for themselves and encouraging the development of these skills in their children.

If family literacy programs are to be powerful enough to instigate a process of shaping values, changing lives and changing society, much more is required in skills and knowledge to facilitate and support these major changes than has generally been understood. To achieve these ends, family literacy training needs to involve knowledge from a variety of disciplines and experiences including:

- early childhood development and emergent literacy
- family systems theory
- counseling
- social work
- life skills and adult education
- participatory philosophy
- traditional literacy and parenting practices, and
- administrative skills to name but a few.

Such a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience from diverse but related fields, cannot possibly be learned through short workshops and prescriptive manuals.

The wisdom of the community as a whole is needed in creating the vision, in assessing strengths, needs and resources, in developing a joint mandate, in planning, in proposal writing, in programming, and in evaluation. When family literacy programming comes out of a community development approach, the vision of family literacy grows to become integrally connected to the social, physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional wellbeing and development of the family and community. When the community as a whole takes ownership, the chances of sustainability are greatly increased.

CURRENT BLIND SPOTS

1) UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF TRAINING:
At first glance, family literacy programming might not seem complex, and therefore training and skills for facilitators might not need to be that involved. Frequently individuals have been expected to learn "all there is to know" in one workshop, regardless of their background skills and experience, and then to be responsible for implementing a family literacy program. No one workshop or manual can provide this for an individual.

2) NOMINAL PARTNERSHIPS
Frequently family literacy programming has been seen as the responsibility of one person or one organization. Partnerships have often been initiated solely for the purpose of meeting funding guidelines without the development needed to build true collaboration.

3) FUNDING: AN OPPORTUNITY AND A RISK
Recent provincial grants have given exposure and funding options to organizations that previously had not considered family literacy as their mandate. Organizations find themselves in the predicament of applying for and receiving funding before they have a clear understanding of family literacy and programming, the strengths of the community or the training they require. Delivery of a program has taken precedence over the time spent on training and developing a community vision of the "whole".

4) MISUNDERSTANDING OF *Come Read With Me*
Most family literacy training in Saskatchewan has been through *Come Read With Me* (*CRWM*) workshops. *CRWM* training and materials were originally developed for people who had prior experience and training in four areas: life skills, adult literacy development, parenting and early childhood development. The training manual was to be a starting point to which facilitators could add rather than a complete manual in itself.

Likewise, training was not intended as complete in itself, but rather as a starting point, to which facilitators would add prior knowledge and adapt for particular groups. A key part of the training was to model a process for drawing out the strengths and skills of participants.

In practice, few participants in *CRWM* facilitator training had a background in all of the prerequisite areas and an increasing number of participants did not have a strong background in any of them despite having rich and diverse life experience. Many key areas of *CRWM* training were not adequately covered for some participants. Certain areas covered in training were not reinforced in the materials. At times organizations attempted to use the *CRWM* binder without training. Somehow *CRWM* began to be seen as a model in itself, and participants expected that the training and accompanying manual would provide a standard way of conducting sessions.

5) LACK OF A VISION FOR FAMILY LITERACY
Various training options such as PRINTS and LAPS have been offered in Saskatchewan. Each of these models provides part of the "whole" yet each is most often being used in isolation. There is no prescription which communities can use to assess their training strengths and needs and available options because there has not been in-depth discussion on a provincial level about what a vision of the "whole elephant" entails and what that means for training.

THE PRESCRIPTION FOR A WHOLE VISION

1) In the same way that family literacy has changed the focus of literacy development from individuals to families, a community development approach must change the focus of family literacy training from individuals to communities.

2) A checklist of learning objectives should be developed, with the input from various fields of expertise. It would identify the scope of skills and knowledge required for a "whole elephant" vision of family literacy programming and act as a self-assessment tool for communities in determining their training needs.

3) Training modules need to be developed to meet the objectives in the checklist. Current materials need to be reviewed and materials added as needed.

4) Plain language materials need to be developed for the training modules. For example, key research articles and discussion papers need to be rewritten in plain language as they become available.

5) A support system of family literacy mentors and study groups needs to be developed.

POSSIBLE STEPS IN ACHIEVING A WHOLE VISION

The following steps are intended as a starting point for discussion about the establishment of a provincial family literacy strategy. It is understood that regional strategies will be unique and based upon the resources, demographics and realities of each community.

Definition of the Role of Provincial Family Literacy Advisory Committee

Review and Revise Terms of Reference (completed September 29, 1999)

Creating Family Literacy Awareness

1) SLN continue to liaise with ABC CANADA and other provincial coalitions and to promote family literacy at a provincial and regional level.
2) SLN develop information packages on family literacy and community development
3) SLN, Literacy Coordinators or Regional Trainers provide Family Literacy Overview and (to parent education groups, adult and early childhood educators and others).
4) SLN to promote and support regional family literacy focus groups which include a wide range of potential collaborators in family literacy; Regional Trainers and SLN provide consultation prior to seminar

Family Literacy through Community Development

1) Provincial workshop on Family Literacy and Community Development (September 30, 1999).
2) Focus groups held in smaller communities to identify family literacy options and training needs.
3) Regional trainers encourage the development of ongoing family literacy study sessions
4) Ongoing consultation and support from regional trainers and SLN staff.
5) Develop training for Family Literacy Facilitators in Community Development
6) SLN to distribute information about regional activities.

Family Literacy Facilitator Training

1) Level 1 Facilitator Training provided on a regional basis.
2) SLN supports regional training through circulation of training resources and support for trainers.
3) SLN organizes Level 2 Facilitator Training on a provincial level based on ongoing needs assessment of training needs.

NOTE: Discussion Paper on Family Literacy Training Modules follow.

TRAINING MODULES – FOR DISCUSSION

NOTE: It is intended that Prior Learning Assessment will be implemented as an integral part of training to ensure that participants meet prerequisites and so that each training event can be adapted for participants

Family Literacy and Community Development Orientation

GOAL: To develop an awareness of family literacy and begin planning the establishment of family literacy programming.

PARTICIPANTS: Open to the public, NO PREREQUISITES.

CONTENT: What is family literacy, why have family literacy programming; Family Literacy Standards; "strengths-based, participatory" model vs. deficit approach; characteristics of a community development approach; funding sources; SLN's role; overview of checklist and needs assessment and family literacy training options; options for adding family literacy to existing parenting and early childhood programs.

LENGTH/FORMAT: Half day presentation with group discussion; adapted for audience.

RESOURCE MATERIALS: Family Literacy Resource Guide (SLN, 1999)
NOTE: Add information on other parenting programs

PRESENTERS: SLN Staff and regional Literacy Coordinators, Family Literacy Trainers

DELIVERY OPTIONS:
- Multi-media learning package, background readings
- Process-based, participatory workshop, short presentations interspersed with interactive learning methods

An Introduction to Family Literacy Program Models

GOAL:
- To provide an overview of family literacy models and training options
- To explore family literacy activities and how they can be incorporated into parenting programs.

PARTICIPANTS: 10 – 18 participants (Administrators, prospective participants, educators, community agency staff)

PREREQUISITE: Family Literacy Orientation

POSSIBLE CONTENT:
- An overview of various family literacy models through video and demonstration.

EXAMPLES: Nurturing with Rhymes, PRINTS, LAPS, PALS (Parents Assist Learning and Schooling), *Come Read With Me*

- Introduction to Family Literacy Basic Education Curriculum

LENGTH/FORMAT: Half day

RESOURCE MATERIALS: information package with summary of each program, checklist of skills, videos where available, long distance information services

PRESENTERS: SLN staff, literacy coordinators, family literacy trainers

DELIVERY OPTIONS:

- Literacy Level - several shorter sessions, and be part of ongoing training for literacy learners and informal parent groups, with continued support
- Customized workshops for parent or early childhood education groups

Family Literacy Sampler - An Introduction

GOAL: To explore family literacy activities and how they can be incorporated into parenting programs.

PARTICIPANTS: 10 – 18 participants (prospective participants, educators, community agency staff)

PREREQUISITE: Family Literacy Orientation

POSSIBLE CONTENT:

- Positive cycles within our homes, unique home literacy behaviours
- Stages of literacy development in children and importance of early home literacy development
- Identifying learning styles and appropriate literacy activities
- Book-sharing and related activities
- Group Process: starting a group; setting guidelines; helpful and hindering group member roles; sharing responsibility for the group
- Accommodating participants with literacy issues
- Identifying available support systems and resources

LENGTH/FORMAT: Half to one day, workshop

RESOURCE MATERIALS: Tip sheets for parents

PRESENTERS: Family literacy trainers as authorized by SLN

DELIVERY OPTIONS:

- Literacy Level - several shorter sessions, and be part of ongoing training for literacy learners and informal parent groups, with continued support
- Customized workshops for parent or early childhood education groups

"Family Literacy through Community Development"

GOAL: to provide participants with information and skills for program planning within their communities

PARTICIPANTS: administrators, coordinators, program developers, advisory boards, community leaders

PREREQUISITES: Family literacy orientation; knowledge of program options

CONTENT:

- Characteristics of community development approach
- Developing an action plan for a strengths-based, participatory program through the community development process
- Assessing strengths, resources and needs of community; identification of stakeholders
- Involving key stakeholders and potential program participants in planning
- Setting goals, decision-making; "Family Literacy Standards"/evaluation
- Criteria for choosing literature and resources
- Staffing skills and knowledge required; assessing training needs (use of skill checklist)
- Working with volunteers
- Planning for sustainability; applying for grants, proposal writing

DELIVERY OPTIONS:

- Interactive, process-based seminar could be designed for larger groups; variable in length, depending on areas of training requested
- Self-instruction using a guidebook with long-distance assistance/consultation
- Ongoing work group in which individual communities are led through community development for family literacy planning process on a step-by-step basis, customized to need of participants from one community

Facilitator Training – Level 1

GOAL: To provide basic training in family literacy group facilitation

PARTICIPANTS: Professionals in either adult education or early childhood education

PREREQUITES: Documented experience/expertise in facilitating adult group learning or early childhood education

CONTENT:

- Rationale for family literacy programming
- Strengths based, participatory philosophy
- Review of principles and philosophy of adult education, group process
- Opportunity for participants to model use of materials
- Checklist of skills
- Support services and resources

LENGTH/FORMAT: 2-3 days, designed for groups of approx. 10 to 18

RESOURCE MATERIALS: Revised *Come Read With Me* manual

TRAINERS: Authorized by SLN and senior Family Literacy trainers

DELIVERY OPTIONS:
- For adult educators emphasis would be on activities
- For early childhood educators, emphasis would be on adult education principles, group facilitation and process

Facilitator Training - Level 2

GOAL: To provide in-service training for Family Literacy facilitators

PARTICIPANTS: 10-20 individuals

PREREQUISITES: Completion of Level 1 Family Literacy training; experience working with groups of parents; Prior Learning Assessment

EXAMPLES OF TRAINING OPTIONS:
- Multiple Intelligence
- Nurturing with Rhymes
- Literacy and Parenting Skills*
- Parenting Skills
- Plain Language Principles
- "Drawing the Line" – knowing when to call for counselling help

(NOTE: This is one of the Level 2 Tutor Training Modules currently being developed by the SLN)
- Learning and Violence
- Learning Disabilities
- Leadership styles
- Stages of group development; group facilitation and dynamics; understanding group emotional needs and responding to them;
- Practical ways to move from directive to strengths-based participatory curriculum
- Ongoing participatory evaluation
- Current family literacy research reports
- ADHD

LENGTH/FORMAT/RESOURCE MATERIALS: to be decided by presenter

CONCLUSIONS

This report outlines a strategy for a provincially wide community development approach to family literacy programming and the training that would support this development. It is intended to broaden awareness beyond government levels and the organizations and agencies that apply for grant funding. It provides a structure for a growing development of skills for programming and for training.

A key point is the development of a shared vision of what constitutes the "whole" scope of skills and knowledge around family literacy programming. This does not deny the need for diversity in programming built on the creativity, strengths and needs of individual communities. Rather, it is intended to strengthen the quality of individual programs, regardless of the model. The strategy calls for the development of a checklist to identify the scope of skills and knowledge involved in family literacy programming and to provide a better way for communities to assess their strengths and training needs. It also calls for the development of training models and well-developed, plain language resource materials.

A vision of the work involved in the "Visioning the Whole Elephant" strategy does seem as massive as the elephant itself. Yet, much more time, money and effort often goes into individual blind "forays" to the family literacy programming "pond". In the long run, the family literacy movement in Saskatchewan will benefit from heeding the Elephant Moral:

"WISDOM COMES FROM SEEING THE WHOLE."